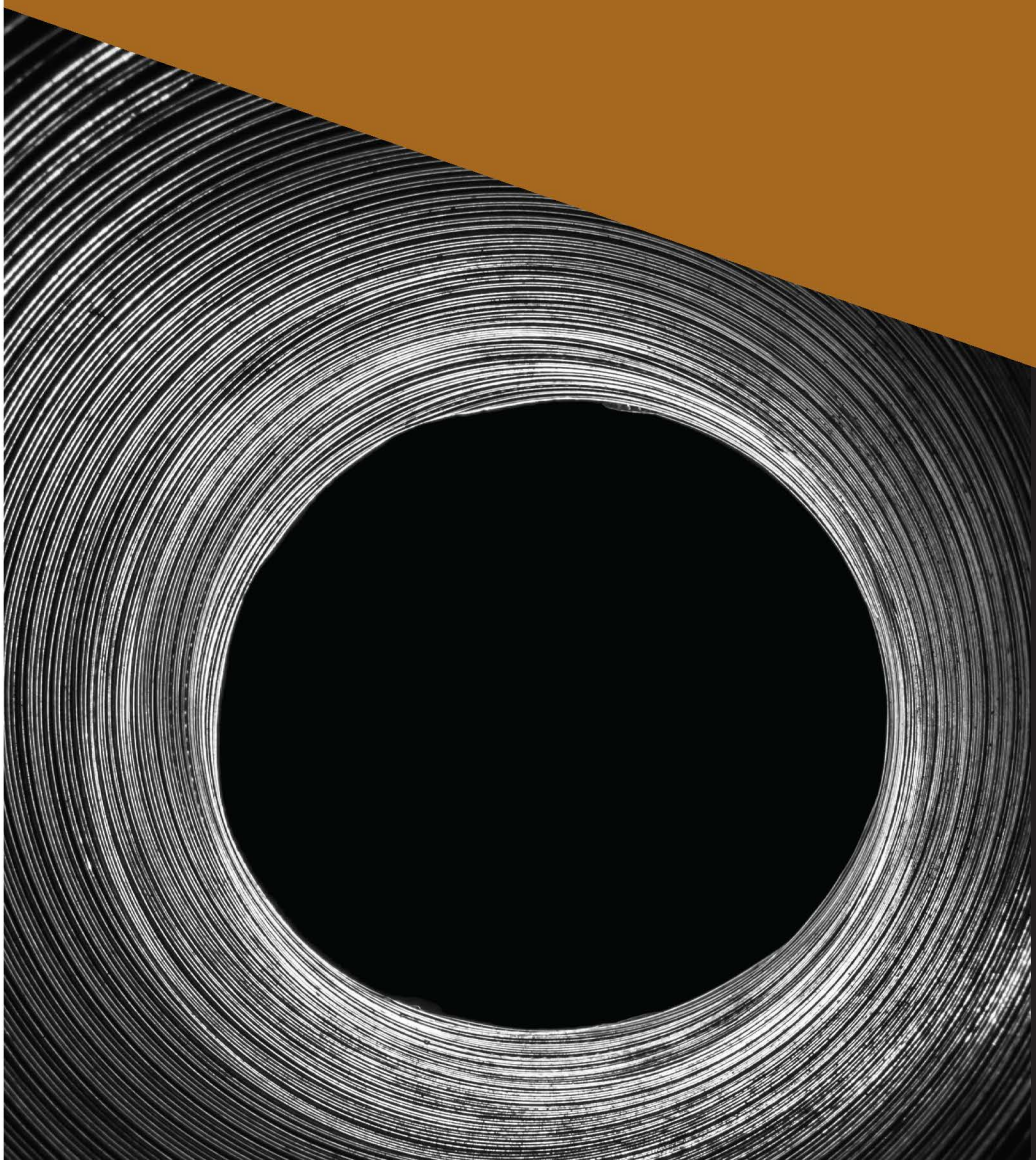
A PLACE MORE VOID

Edited by PAUL KINGSBURY and ANNA J. SECOR



12 Raising Sasquatch to the Place of the Cryptozoological Thing

Oliver Keane and Paul Kingsbury

An increasingly prominent site where Bigfoot or Sasquatch organizations and individual researchers meet to share and discuss their findings are the now dozen or so annual Sasquatch conferences located across the United States.[1] Given the lack of academic research on Sasquatch investigation cultures, however, we know very little about who attends these events, why they attend, and what they do there (Jenzen and Munt 2013). To address this gap in the literature, our chapter explores the case study of the 2016 Sasquatch Summit (hereafter the "Summit"), which took place during the long weekend of November 20–22 at the Quinault Beach Resort and Casino on Quinault Indian Nation land in Grays Harbor, Washington. One of the most striking features of the Summit was the extent to which it resembled a conventional academic conference in terms of the prominence of nametags, swag-filled tote bags, speakers' PowerPoint presentations, workshops, and late-night theory debates in the hotel lobby bar. What distinguished the Summit from a conventional academic conference, such as the American Association of Geographers Annual meeting, was the extent to which it revolved around an inescapable and fundamental absence: the lack of data or a material artefact capable of definitely proving the existence of its main object of study. This raises an intriguing question: how exactly, under the aegis of a "research conference" (to use one of the Summit's webpage monikers), is it possible to represent, debate, and share knowledge about a living

entity that science and the vast majority of people regard as nonexistent? (Chapman University 2018).

Following Jacques Lacan (1992), we argue that the Summit situates or, more precisely, "raises" Sasquatch to the "place" of "the Thing" (*das Ding*), that is, an inaccessible yet invasive and alluring void. This Thing, however, is not simply nothing nor an absence. Rather, in Lacan's (1992) crypto-metaphysical vein, it is a generative and captivating negativity that both creates and is retroactively created by various imaginary and symbolic representations or stand-ins, which Lacan calls the "Other thing" (118). We argue that the Summit's proliferation of Other things—Sasquatch footprint casts, video and audio clips, merchandise, and so on—transforms and concretizes Sasquatch into what we call the "cryptozoological Thing" via the process of sublimation. Specifically, we illustrate how two interrelated paradoxes of sublimation concretize the void of the cryptozoological Thing at the Summit. First, we discuss how the processes of signification, which comprise the Summit's Other things, encircle and carve out the alluring place of the cryptozoological Thing. Such a process is paradoxical because it entails making something out of nothing. And second, we map the spatial concentration of at least two seemingly irreconcilable discourses between Native and non-Native attendees about the ontological status of Sasquatch. While an impasse would seem to preclude a relationship with the cryptozoological Thing, these very differences are already the cryptozoological Thing itself. Here, the paradox concerns how a relationship can be maintained by obstruction. Before elaborating in-depth on exactly how these processes occur at the Summit, we first discuss the field of cryptozoology and Lacan's concepts of the Thing and sublimation.

What Is Cryptozoology?

The term *cryptozoology*, which was coined during the 1950s and is etymologically derived from the Greek words for "hidden" (*kryptos*), "animal" (*zoion*), and "study" (*logia*), concerns "the study of unknown, legendary, or extinct animals whose existence or survival to the present day is disputed or unsubstantiated" (*OED* 2019). Some of these animals or "cryptids" have

been allegedly observed for centuries and are thus culturally significant (Coleman and Clark 1999; Regal 2011). By combining scientific and cultural discourses, cryptozoology disrupts the ideological distinction between science and society that ossified during the late nineteenth century. At this time physical anthropologists believed that humans were the only extant hominoid species. Subsequent discoveries, however, of hominoid fossils in many locations around the world and the discovery of the mountain gorilla in 1902 prompted some scientists and amateur researchers to question this belief (Krulos 2015). These doubts, coupled with numerous oral testimonies and historical records of observations, encounters, and even interactions with simian-like creatures among Indigenous, settler, and migrant populations gave rise to the cryptozoological movement. Early cryptozoologists argued that large, bipedal, and hair-covered hominoids were extant and living in remote wilderness regions of the earth. These creatures are said to exist in remote forest and mountain areas, especially the Himalayan region where they are known as "Yeti" (the Anglicization of an indigenous Sherpa term), "Abominable Snowmen," or "Meetoh Kangmi" (a Tibetan term), as well as across western Canada and the northwestern United States, where they are known as "Sasquatch" (the Anglicization of a First Nations phrase) (Deis, Coleman, and Doyle 2015) or "Bigfoot" (popularized by a journalist in 1958) (Coleman and Clark 1999; McLeod 2009).

Today cryptozoology is widely dismissed as a pseudoscience because its objects of study are considered to be the products of folklore, hoaxing, or simple misidentification. Yet cryptozoology remains a prominent topic in popular culture, especially in the context of paranormal investigation cultures (Jenzen and Munt 2013). Spurred on by the now-iconic one-minute long "Patterson-Gimlin" film shot in 1967 in northern California, consolidated by 1970s docudramas such as *The Legend of Boggy Creek* (1972) and *Sasquatch, the Legend of Bigfoot* (1976), and internationally disseminated by popular television documentaries in the early 2000s such as *Finding Bigfoot* on Animal Planet, interest in searching for and proving the existence of Sasquatch has grown in recent years (McLeod 2009). In the past several decades there has also been a steady increase in the number of local

22. The Great Hall. Source: Keane and Kingsbury.

(e.g., the British Columbia Scientific Cryptozoological Club, founded in 1989) and international (e.g., the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization, founded in 1995) organizations that study alleged evidence of Sasquatch activity using field methods such as tracking, footprint casting, and video and audio recordings. In the past decade or so the growth of these organizations has been propelled by online discussion forums, photo- and video-sharing websites such as YouTube, and the organization webpages and social media channels that disseminate map data, images, and discussions of purported Sasquatch sightings.

One of the consequences of the rise of online cryptozoological communities is the growth of conferences such as the Summit. The Summit was founded in 2013, and according to its main organizer, Johnny Manson, "over 600" people attended the 2016 event (fig. 22).[2] Attendees were predominantly white, mainly working class and non-college-educated, typically male, and residents of nearby states (Washington, Oregon, California, and Idaho). This particular demographic reflects the historical

and geographical context of Sasquatch research more generally, wherein the rural locations in which the expeditions take place are predominantly white and working class. In addition, their remote and rugged topographies have been historically and culturally regarded as the domain for men rather than women. Numerous researchers, however, supported the increased participation of women researchers in the past decade or so. We also learned that the main reason why someone would attend the Summit was because they or someone they knew had an extraordinary encounter or numerous extraordinary encounters with something they believed to be or in many cases were utterly convinced was a Sasquatch or a group of Sasquatches. The heady combination of the concrete and the incredible is central to Lacan's notions of the Thing and sublimation.

The Thing and Sublimation

Lacan introduced the concept of the Thing (*das Ding*) in his seventh annual public seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (hereafter "*Seminar VII*"), which took place on a fortnightly basis during the 1959–1960 school year in the Hôpital Sainte-Anne, Paris. The Thing is intimately related to the register of the real, that is, a part of psychical life that disturbs from within and without psychical and social reality, which for Lacan consists of language and social codes (the symbolic), as well as meanings, values, and visual images (the imaginary). As part of the real, the Thing is the trace of a "prehistoric, unforgettable Other, that later no one will ever reach" (Lacan 1992, 56) and "characterized by the fact that it is impossible for us to imagine it" (125). From a Lacanian perspective, then, human subjectivity is borne out of traumatic encounters with the Thing, which are "strange and even hostile on occasion, or in any case the first outside" (52). The psychical boundary between the outside and the inside is established through the dyadic interactions between the child and the maternal Thing: the primordial (m) Other. According to Joan Copjec (2002), the child's separation from the Thing "opens up a hole in being . . . not that the mother escapes representation or thought, but that the jouissance [intense libidinal enjoyment] that attached me to her has been lost and this loss depletes the whole of

my being" (35–36). This encounter inaugurates what Lacan provocatively calls "castration" wherein the intervention of language inaugurates the social subject via her separation from a once complete being. One way to recuperate this lost jouissance (enjoyment) is through sublimation.

Sigmund Freud established the conventional psychoanalytic understanding of sublimation and conceptualized it as one of the vicissitudes of the drives. For Freud, sublimation involves the redirection or modification of the aim and object of the drives toward socially and ethically prized goals and achievements. In contrast, Lacan theorized sublimation as a process that transforms the object of the drives insofar as it is changed from a mundane object into a sublime object, that is, an object that exceeds its material dimensions and radiates mesmerizing though potentially terrifying jouissance. Lacan's (1992) "most general formula" for sublimation is that it "raises an object . . . to the dignity of the Thing" (112). A key point here is that any object can be "elevated" (another preferred term of Lacan's) to the place of the Thing (see Kingsbury 2011a, 2011b). As a sublime object, the Thing is intensely desirable though impossible to attain because it is located in the real. Yet the Thing can "drop" or "fall out" of the real and threaten the psychical stability of the subject. We expand on this point below and how it informs two aspects of sublimation at the Summit.

Encircling the Cryptozoological Thing

Throughout *Seminar VII* Lacan (1992) likens the structure of the Thing to vases, canons, matchboxes, macaroni, as well as honey and mustard pots. At first glance these everyday objects would seem to possess wildly different structures. Yet each of them, like the Thing, is topologically the same insofar as they are created around an initial emptiness, introducing "the possibility of filling it" (121). Crucially, the Thing is made out of "the fashioning of the signifier," which involves the intensive localization of numerous "signifying units," which Lacan likens to the processes of "flocculation" and "crystallization" (118). To illustrate his point Lacan tells an anecdote about being overwhelmed by the "truly imposing multiplicity" (114) of the artistic arrangement of a friend's matchbox collection that

23. Sasquatch prints leading to registration. Source: Keane and Kingsbury.

24. Bottles of Sasquatch attractant. Source: Keane and Kingsbury.

sprawled along a mantelpiece, wall, molding, and door. Similarly, much of the Summit consisted of the conspicuous proliferation and spatial concentration of signifying units of Sasquatch.

Even before arriving at the conference venue, during the car journey we encountered numerous signifiers of Sasquatch: yellow and black Sasquatch crosswalk signs and strategically placed wooden silhouettes of Sasquatch peeking from behind roadside trees. Upon entering the Quinault Beach Resort and Casino building, we checked in and followed a path of Sasquatch-sized footprint stickers on the floor (fig. 23). Conference registration took place in a small room chockablock with more Sasquatch signifiers, which operate as the Other thing, such as a life-sized statue, stickers, patches, cupholders, T-shirts, posters, holiday greetings cards, "Sasqrunch" baked caramel corn snacks, and even spray bottles of simulated "authentic Sasquatch pheromone" called "Desire" (fig. 24). Having registered for the Summit, we left the cramped room and went into the main conference room called the "Great Hall." This room would soon become a weekend-long packed scene of eight hour-long talks, numerous impassioned town hall–style witness testimony sessions, looped audio and video clips of alleged Sasquatch encounters, and table displays of more "Squatchy" objects such as books, trucker caps, beanie hats, tape measures, stickers, patches, buttons, T-shirts, koozies, footprint casts, and so on.

In their "wholly gratuitous, proliferating, superfluous and quasi absurd" (Lacan 1992, 114) numbers, all these signifiers intensified the fascination of Sasquatch and helped "colonize the field of *das Ding*" (99). That is to say, all these Sasquatch signifiers not only generated an aura (*Erscheinung* [114], to use Lacan's phrase); they also carved out "the space or central place in which the Thing as such presents itself" (118). Here, the Summit's "fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or a hole [the Thing] in the real is identical" (121) because its Thing—the cryptozoological Thing—is instantiated as real: an as yet unproven, uncaptured, and unsubstantiated object that both evades and invades the symbolic and imaginary schemes of cryptozoology. As something that evades and invades, this place of the cryptozoological Thing is not only empty because it demarcates a void; it

25. Dunes and beach lit up at night. Source: Keane and Kingsbury.

is also topologically structured insofar as it is both inside and outside the conference site as an "intimate exteriority" (Lacan 1992, 139). Specifically, the cryptozoological Thing is located in "both the real of the subject and the real he has to deal with as exterior to him" (118). Though devoid of empirical matter, the Thing coagulates as a pressure point in the real—the source and summit of jouissance—lurking in the warm and brightly lit interiority of the conference and in the looming primeval pine forests surrounding it on the outside. Adding to this topological twist were the swathes of woodland camouflage clothes circulating inside the building and the oceanfront rooms enticing its guests (including ourselves) to look outside onto the gale-blown vegetated dunes and beach (permanently illuminated at night by huge floodlights) and scene of multiple Sasquatch sightings (fig. 25).

While the Great Hall provided an arena for attendees to talk about the ultimately failed attempts to definitively prove the existence of Sasquatch, these attempts nonetheless succeeded as iterations of a "repetitious, con-

26. The Olympic Project's Sasquatch footprint casts. Source: Keane and Kingsbury.

stant, cyclical return to an initial point of attachment" (Johnston 2005, 317), that is, to an all-too brief and fleeting encounter with Sasquatch. As the T-shirt for sale stated: "Sasquatch ☯ you complete me." Along two walls of the room, parallel to the rows of hundreds of chairs, were the vendor, speaker, and Sasquatch organization tables. Many tables were laden with collections of Sasquatch footprint casts (fig. 26). Just like the potter, the cryptozoologist creates a cast using their hands out of an emptiness. Like a vase or matchbox, the casts are formed around a hole. They materialize the impression of a void just like the marks in three sets of deer and elk rib bones on another table. According to the researcher (during a lecture at the Summit) who found them at Mount St. Helens in Washington, the "masticatory impression" evinced the "enclosure of the [Sasquatch] teeth." Other casts included the mold of a Sasquatch clitoris, anus, thighs, and buttocks.

The cryptozoological Thing's power of fascination is generated not by its immediate properties but rather by the place it occupies in fantasy space, that is, the space where desire and jouissance is organized. Its allure is contingent upon cryptozoologists apprehending their Thing from a specific distance that maintains a gap between, on the one hand, the real, that is, the impossible and inaccessible place of a non-empirical object (the cryptozoological Thing) and, on the other hand, the symbolic and imaginary, that is, the empirical realm of objects such as casts and bones (Other things). This distance demarcates a difference between jouissance and pleasure. Freud theorized the psyche as a dialectical relationship between the reality principle, which is a "call to order" and the pleasure principle, which "naturally tends toward deception and error" (Lacan 1992, 28). The pleasure principle aims to increase pleasure, which is defined as a reduction in excessive excitation (jouissance), while the reality principle, which is not objective because it ultimately is made "out of pleasure" (225), aims to correct erroneous attempts at reducing excitation by the pleasure principle. Central to Lacan's (1992) argument is the idea that the function of the pleasure principle is to "lead the subject from signifier to signifier, by generating as many signifiers as are required to maintain at a low level as possible the tension" (119) of the psychic apparatus. By generating a smooth movement from signifier to signifier, the pleasure principle prohibits the subject from getting too close to the Thing. Exemplifying the collapse of the distance between reality and the real was Mitchel Townsend's lecture at the Summit, which began with a recollection of his "spirit journey" during a Sasquatch expedition: "I had a vision in a dream, a waking dream that I needed to go to a certain spot on a certain river and the truth would be revealed to me. . . . I went to the spot on the river and on the ground were thousands of artifacts, thousands, that had been exposed as the river had risen and fallen." These artifacts allowed Townsend to emphatically declare the following: "Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you, I can't give it to you, you own it, we all own it. Yes, I own them, but, they're ours. Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the only morphologically correct hybrid hominid scaled footprint carved into solid rock in the history of this world."

While the rock mimics the structure of the footprint casts insofar as it is the material impression of a void, Townsend claimed he has definitely proved the existence of Sasquatch: "There it is. You wanted proof? There it is. Go ahead take pictures." In an interview shortly after the talk, Townsend told us: "Bigfoot is solved! I solved it today. I actually solved it two months ago. I've proven it through verifiable, impossible-to-fake, impossible-to-hoax, microscopically verifiable forensic dental impression. . . . I also have the only anatomically correct Bigfoot print, hybridized Bigfoot print chipped into solid rock 80,000 years old that's the Crown or the Queen's Jewel. Done deal. Solved!"

By offering up the "Queen's Jewel" on stage, which he did so by slowly lifting it out of a small wooden box and carefully unwrapping it out of protective paper, as the cryptozoological Thing itself, Townsend disrupts the pleasure principle because he terminates the movement of the subject along a path of signifiers. As a result, Townsend ushers in an overproximate and threatening encounter with the Other thing. It is threatening because it obliterates the distance between the Other thing and the cryptozoological Thing, that is, between signification and the void. Notably during the hour-long Q&A session, which closed the Summit's proceedings, Townsend was the only presenter not to get a question from the audience. What, then, are we to make of Townsend's claim? Our contention is that he tells the truth in the form of a fiction. His presentation recalls Slavoj Žižek's (2014) interpretation of the disappearance of the former police detective John "Scottie" Ferguson's desire in the experience of losing Madeleine Elster (who was originally impersonated by Judy Barton as part of a murder plot) in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: it "is not simply that Judy is a fake (he knows that she is not the true Madeleine, since he recreated a copy of Madeleine out of her), but that, because she is *not* a fake—she *is* Madeleine; Madeleine *herself* was already a fake—*objet a* disintegrates, the very loss is lost, we get a negation of negation" (99; emphasis in the original). The Queen's Jewel is not simply fake; it is fictional but not as a symbolic falsehood or imaginary deception. Townsend in a twisted irony told the truth: Sasquatch is real because it is the cryptozoological Thing: it is the sum of its signifiers that encircle it and is never itself.

Obstructing the Cryptozoological Thing

Earlier we stated that the making of signifiers and the localization of the Thing as hole in the center of the real occurs simultaneously. Here, the Thing is the result of a gap "between the thing-in-itself (the noumenal) and the thing as it appears (the phenomena)" (Secor 2008, 2625). Crucially the Thing is located in the very gap that demarcates the difference between the noumenal and phenomenal, which can be localized and apprehended in everyday practices and objects. As Žižek notes, the Thing "*is* this particular object, but that this object is strangely split . . . the split is within the object itself" because it "is both itself and, at the same time, something else" (Žižek and Daly 2004, 67). Addressing the Thing's paradoxical status as something that is at once accessible and inaccessible, Lacan (1992) asserts that "the whole of psychic life is obliged, to encircle it or bypass it in order to conceive it . . . it always presents itself as a veiled entity" (118). That is to say, the Thing is concretized because it is *as if* something were hidden behind representation, *as if* something were inaccessible to us. As if, because "this radical antinomy which seems to preclude our access to the Thing is already the Thing" (Žižek 2006, 26). That is, the Thing is an unobtainable object not because it lies beyond our reach or because it is hidden out of our view in a zone of inaccessibility. Rather, the Thing *is* precisely this very obstacle. This is why Lacan (1992) designates courtly love with its seemingly inaccessible lady as "an exemplary form, a paradigm, of sublimation" (128).

Anna Secor (2008) has usefully illustrated the above paradoxes via Žižek's notion of the "parallax gap" or the antinomic differences that comprised the 1995 O. J. Simpson trial (was he guilty or innocent?) and the U.S.-led war on Iraq (was the conflict the result of global capitalism or military territorial power?). The parallax gap comprises the truth of each situation, but it cannot be discerned by digging for or unveiling a hidden, deeper truth (whether Simpson was *really* guilty or innocent or whether the Iraq War was *really* about money or territory). Rather, the truth is in "*the difference itself*" that comprises the two opposing positions (Secor 2008, 2625;

emphasis in the original). In this section we illustrate how the alluring power of the cryptozoological Thing, which is comparable to the parallax gap, is concretized as a result of the differences that comprise seemingly irreconcilable discourses about the ontological status of Sasquatch. According to Manson:

> You have the science-based blood and guts kind of thinkers or believers, if you know, they can't touch it or feel it. And then you have the paranormal, they call it the "woo-woo" and they're the ones that claim that Sasquatch can mentally communicate with you, can cloak. Some, depending on how down the rabbit-hole you go, link them to UFOs and other kinds of supernatural things. I don't necessarily support those theories. I just think it should be represented. If it's there, if it has a major impact in the research community then it should be represented. I swear some of these conferences will only have the "para" or the "woo" or will only have the blood and guts. But I wanted a mixture, so let the guests decide for themselves.[3]

Echoing Žižek's (1993) discussion on how the consolidation of a social group depends on the unique way it "*organizes its enjoyment*" (201; emphasis in the original) around its Thing and the protection of this enjoyment from being stolen by another social group, the (to use Johnny Mason's categorizations) "blood and guts" and "woo" camps each affirmed and defended their particular ways of researching and thus enjoying their Thing. One such way was to undermine the opposing party's viewpoint. Here the scientific position criticized the paranormal position for not gathering evidence carefully enough, while the paranormal camp ridiculed the science camp for not taking seriously enough the singularity of people's encounters with Sasquatch. Perhaps the most prevalent and contentious difference over the cryptozoological Thing concerned debates over whether Sasquatch was an undiscovered human or nonhuman primate. One researcher at the Summit told us, "I'm learning something about their habits, something about how they interact with humans." The distinction between "them" and "humans" implies that Sasquatch is nonhuman. Similarly, D. Jeff Meldrum (2007), a speaker at the Summit and professor of anatomy and anthropology at

Idaho State University, suggested that Sasquatch might be related to the thought-to-be extinct giant ape *Gigantopithecus blacki*, which according to the fossil record possessed teeth of "clear hominoid design" (100).

In contrast to the nonhuman camp, Native American attendees asserted that Sasquatch was human. As one Native American (a member of the Quinault Indian Nation) investigator put it: "[Sasquatches are] an ancient people . . . we're all hybrid hominids, different heights, different colored hair, different body types. We are it and it is us. That's why there's so many different kinds." According to Manson, "I approached the Quinault and they were very supportive of [the conference] and this is their realm and they have grown and lived with the Sasquatch people for centuries." Another member of the Quinault tribe also announced during a brief speech before the prayer that opened up the conference proceedings that all the attendees should "have a respect for those people . . . we call them people out there." This difference has been entrenched by previous scientific discourses about Native Americans. According to Meldrum (2007), "geographically restricted surveys [of Native American cultures] do present an emerging consensus of a . . . humanlike animal . . . Just how humanlike are these animals in the Native American mind? Clayton Mack [a renowned First Nations hunter and guide] concluded, 'Half man, half animal, I think'" (87). Our findings, however, challenge this claim insofar as it was the Native investigators who posited Sasquatch as fully human and the non-Native investigators as half animal. We should also note the certainty that accompanied the Native American researchers' claims of the human status of Sasquatch. One of these researchers told us the following: "knowing" that Sasquatch are "a people" means that "the veil's been pulled back because our intentions and our heart is true."

Instead of attempting to reconcile the differences between the human and nonhuman positions, Summit attendees respectfully disagreed with or simply ignored the other's point of view (recall the repression of Townsend's claim during the Q & A session). We believe this lack of engagement is because the real difference between these two opposing views is "not an external difference between two positively identified logics" (Secor

2008, 2626). That is to say, the scientific nonhuman position is not simply the flip side or Other of the Native human position and vice versa. Rather, the fundamental difference between these positions is a minimal difference that emerges out of the shared impossibility of ever catching or ontologically containing Sasquatch, that is, closing the gap between knowable phenomena (the Other thing qua the signifiers "nonhuman," "human," "people," and so on) and an unknowable thing-in-itself (the cryptozoological Thing). This impossibility is not an impediment to each side's research agenda. Rather, the impossibility constitutes a creative relation or perhaps, more accurately, a nonrelation with the cryptozoological Thing. Why? Because this very impossibility enables both parties to create something out of nothing, that is, to create Other things out of the cryptozoological Thing. This nothing, however, is not an absence or something missing from reality. It is not the lack of concrete hard evidence qua a scientific specimen that would prove the reality or positive existence of Sasquatch. Rather, this nothing *is* part of reality because reality itself *is* incomplete: it is the hole of the real around which signifiers circulate, and so it can never be captured or fully known by a scientific discourse, or any discourse for that matter.

Mobilizing the differences between the blood and guts paradigm (Sasquatch is actually a biological being) versus the woo paradigm (Sasquatch is actually a paranormal entity) or the animal paradigm (Sasquatch is actually a nonhuman primate) versus the human paradigm (Sasquatch is actually a person) sublimates or elevates Sasquatch to the place of the cryptozoological Thing. Again, this Thing is not unobtainable because it is buried deeper and rendered inaccessible as a result of the disjunctions between the opposing viewpoints. Rather, the Thing *is* their very difference or shift in perspectives from one to another that comprises the reality of the Summit. This reality is "'non-All'. It is not all there is, but there is nothing beyond it, and this Nothing is Being itself" (Secor 2008, 2625). Or, to put it in the words of the renowned YouTube cryptozoologist "ThinkerThunker" with all the connotations of a Lacanian negation of the negation, the Summit is a testament to why "Bigfoot doesn't not exist."

The Dignity of the Cryptological Thing

In this chapter, we argued that the Summit allows attendees to enjoy and believe in their cryptozoological Thing insofar as it is "represented by something else" (Lacan 1992, 118), that is, Other things. As part of the process of sublimation, this Thing concerns the "oblig[ation] . . . to encircle or bypass it in order to conceive it. Wherever it affirms itself, it does so in domesticated spheres" (118). Conference events such as the Summit exemplify such spheres because they are highly structured contexts in which communities can rally around their Thing and enjoy it from a safe distance, "avoiding the destructive encounter with the real and allowing desire to proceed in a domesticated environment" (Neill 2011, 139). Exposing somebody to the horror of the real could result in a psychotic breakdown, that is, the disintegration of a subject's beliefs, agency, and, perhaps most significantly, desire. In the context of the Summit, it would be tantamount to proving once and for all why Sasquatch cannot or does not exist.

Such a position, of course, is embraced by mainstream scientists, particularly in reaction to the Patterson-Gimlin film. Scientists frequently appear on Sasquatch television documentaries using the falsification of DNA samples as a means of implicitly stating that it is ultimately wrong to believe in the existence of Sasquatch (see Buhs 2009; Evans 2017; Davis 2017). Countering such statements, Meldrum (2004) claims to have validly deduced the existence of Sasquatch based on the Patterson-Gimlin film and footprint evidence. This claim has been published in the semiannual "peer-reviewed" *Journal of Scientific Exploration*. While the journal is regarded by academics as a Fortean and pseudoscientific outlet, to date no scientific peer-reviewed study has disputed the truth or validity of Meldrum's contentions (see also Dixon 2007). One reason for this is because Meldrum's paper presents a basic paradox for mainstream scientists who cannot accept the existence of Sasquatch given the "basic tenet" of science that "neither rejects nor accepts anything without examining the evidence" (Sykes et al. 2014). What, then, are we to make of the scientific assertion that the "advocates in the cryptozoology community have more work to do in order to produce convincing evidence for anomalous primates" (Sykes et al. 2014)?

If anything, the cryptozoological Thing has much to teach us about what counts as legitimate knowledge in contemporary society. We also believe that the Summit and the research practices of cryptozoology more generally should not be understood as delusional or pathological, but rather as creative because like the other "three forms of sublimation, art, religion and science" (Lacan 1992, 129), they are an attempt, and a dignified one at that, to apprehend an object and raise it to the empty place of the Thing.

Notes

We are grateful to Johnny Manson and all the 2016 Sasquatch Summit participants who assisted us with our research. This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Grant No. 435-2015-0355).

1. Because we focus on the *Sasquatch* Summit, we use the term *Sasquatch* for the remainder of the chapter.
2. Johnny Manson, email message to author, January 31, 2018.
3. Johnny Manson, email message to author, January 31, 2018.

References

Buhs, Joshua Blu. 2009. *Bigfoot: The Life and Times of a Legend*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Chapman University. 2018. "Paranormaly America 2018: Chapman University Survey of American Fears" (blog). October 16. https://blogs.chapman.edu/wilkinson/2018/10/16/paranormal-america-2018/ (accessed September 25, 2019).

Coleman, Loren, and Jerome Clark. 1999. *Cryptozoology A to Z: The Encyclopedia of Loch Monsters, Sasquatch, Chupacabras, and Other Authentic Mysteries of Nature*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Copjec, Joan. 2002. *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Davis, Nicola. 2017. "DNA Sampling Exposes Nine 'Yeti Specimens' as Eight Bears and a Dog." *Guardian*. November 29. https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/nov/29/dnasampling-exposes-nine-yeti-specimens-as-eight-bears-and-a-dog (accessed November 29, 2018).

Deis, Robert, David Coleman, and Wyatt Doyle, eds. 2015. *Cryptozoology Anthology: Strange and Mysterious Creatures in Men's Adventure Magazines*. [USA]: New Texture.

Dixon, Deborah. 2007. "A Benevolent and Sceptical Inquiry: Exploring 'Fortean Geographies' with the Mothman." *cultural geographies* 14, no. 2: 189–210.

Evans, Mark. 2017. "Bigfoot Files." Mark Evans website. https://www.markevans.co.uk/television/bigfoot-files/ (accessed November 29, 2017).

Jenzen, Olu, and Sally R. Munt, eds. 2013. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Paranormal Cultures*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.

Johnston, Adrian. 2005. *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*. Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press.

Kingsbury, Paul. 2011a. "Sociospatial Sublimation: The Human Resources of Love in Sandals Resorts International, Jamaica." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 3: 650–69.

———. 2011b. "The World Cup and the National Thing on Commercial Drive, Vancouver." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 4: 716–37.

Krulos, Tea. 2015. *Monster Hunters: On the Trail with Ghost Hunters, Bigfooters, Ufologists, and Other Paranormal Investigators*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.

Lacan, Jacques. 1992. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Jacques Alain Miller. Translated by Dennis Porter. New York: Routledge.

McLeod, Michael. 2009. *Anatomy of a Beast: Obsession and Myth on the Trail of Bigfoot*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Meldrum, D. Jeffrey. 2004. "Midfoot Flexibility, Fossil Footprints, and Sasquatch Steps: New Perspectives on the Evolution of Bipedalism." *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 18, no. 1: 65–79.

———. 2007. *Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science*. New York: Forge.

Neill, Calum. 2011. *Lacanian Ethics and the Assumption of Subjectivity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Oxford English Dictionary (OED) *Online*. 2019. S.v. "Cryptozoology." https://www.oed.com/.

Regal, Brian. 2011. *Searching for Sasquatch: Crackpots, Eggheads, and Cryptozoology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Secor, Anna J. 2008. "Žižek's Dialectics of Difference and the Problem of Space." *Environment and Planning A* 40, no. 11: 2623–30.

Sykes, Bryan C., Rhettman A. Mullis, Christophe Hagenmuller, Terry W. Melton, and Michel Sartori. 2014. "Genetic Analysis of Hair Samples Attributed to Yeti, Bigfoot and Other Anomalous Primates." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 281, no. 1789: 1–3.

Žižek, Slavoj. 1993. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2006. *The Parallax View*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

———. 2014. *Event: A Philosophical Journey through a Concept*. London: Penguin.

Žižek, Slavoj, and Glyn Daly. 2004. *Conversations with Žižek*. Malden MA: Polity.